

WILBUR HALL

The Screws

*A well-liked Red Book
writer here contributes
a powerful story of big
business, and little; of
high politics, and low;
of strong men, and weak.*

*Illustrated by
C. R. Weed*

ROOM NINETEEN of Sailor Hammack's unsavory lodging-house was dirty, cold and comfortless. It was furnished only with a round-topped table, half a dozen battered wooden chairs, a rusty sheet-iron stove that was never lighted, a mildewed old sofa, and a plentitude of spittoons. The floor was partly covered with linoleum, so greasy and faded no one ever knew it was there except when he caught a heel or a chair-leg in one of its many holes. There was one window,—a long, narrow casement, heavily barred without,—but it was useless: it furnished no ventilation, for it was always closed and locked; it furnished no light, for it was opaque with accumulated dust and cobwebs. The only light in the place came from three gas-jets that hung on one pipe in the center and that were so shaded by a metal reflector as to throw all illumination downward in a circle closely coinciding with the circular table-top. That table-top had once been of green felt; now, like the linoleum, it was only noticeable because of its deficiencies.

There was also in Room Nineteen a perpetual odor compounded of gas, tobacco-smoke, liquors and the smell of men, not all of whom were ever entirely clean. There were two doors to the room, one shutting off the corridor of the lodging-house and never unbolted, the other opening directly on a steep and dark pair of stairs that led downward to a storeroom at the rear of Hammack's saloon. This second entrance was the one always used. Finally, Room Nineteen had a sliding panel in one corner which, when opened, disclosed a well leading to the saloon and fitted with a makeshift dumb-waiter. It was, in brief, not a room to feed the imagination, but rather to stir it. In it fortunes had been made and lost, a great city's political destinies determined, and conspiracies planned (and several times consummated) that affected the welfare of many and that terminated the political or physical life of not a few. It had the appearance of being a secret and mysterious rendezvous—and it was.

Into Room Nineteen, dimly lighted by but one of the three gas-jets, there came one night shortly before nine o'clock, a large, carefully dressed man who had felt his way up those dark stairs many times in years gone by, but who had not seen the place now for half a decade. He closed the door behind him and stood a moment quietly looking about. His face, almost hidden by a soft hat pulled low and by the collar of his heavy overcoat turned high, revealed nothing of his thoughts. When he took off the hat, as he did presently, the countenance disclosed was that of a prosperous and important personage of fifty—full, well-colored,



The new arrival was an ex-convict, Malcolm Gaffey.

smooth—in which smoldered dark, inscrutable eyes whose lids were slightly pouched, the whole crowned by dark hair touched with streaks of gray. It would have been difficult to find any other characteristics in the face; yet the most careless observer would have guessed that the man himself was suffering from some depression that he could neither shake off nor hide. When he took out his watch, the timepiece proved a trivial but startling confirmation of the vague idea one formed of him: it was attached to an expensive and beautiful chain, but was itself a common nickel-plated affair, ticking offensively in its bulky case.

As he returned it to its pocket, there were steps on the stairs, and the stairway door opened to admit another man.

The newcomer stood on the threshold, giving the room and its occupant a quick survey.

"Well, Babbin?" he said.

"Come in, Mr. Elder. I was afraid you might fail me."

"I'm always willing to take a chance."

"I suppose that's how you contrive to pull off your biggest news stories."

"That's one way, Mr. Babbin."

He took off his overcoat and threw it over the back of a chair, then sat down. Babbin noticed, with instant appreciation, that the editor chose the chair that faced the stairway door.

"We might as well be comfortable," he said, seating himself against one wall.

Elder watched him, not so much curiously as expectantly. There followed a pause. At length the newspaper man remarked again:

"Well, Babbin?"

"Well, Mr. Elder, I'm waiting for—another man."

"Judge Hanchett?"

"Lord, no! No. No use springing the trap on Hanchett until the case is complete, is there?"

"I don't know, Mr. Babbin." Elder smiled. "I'm not in on anything yet, you know."

Babbin stared. "I thought the Weasel—"

"Saul, you mean? Saul only telephoned me that you and he had Hanchett dead to rights, and that I could sit into the game if I cared to."

"Oh!" Babbin studied. Rather abruptly he demanded: "You'd give a lot to get Judge Hanchett, wouldn't you, Mr. Elder?"

"A good deal—yes. But it must be done quickly."

"Before Tuesday's elections?"

"That's it."

"Is it—personal? Your grudge against the Judge?"

"No. I've never used the *Journal* to carry out my personal revenges." The editor paused, wrinkled his forehead. "In the last few years I don't think I have had any personal grudges. Against Hanchett I have one complaint—he controls a reactionary majority on the supreme bench of the State. He betrays the people in every decision he writes, or dictates to his fellows."

"But your haste to get him now—before Tuesday?" Babbin persisted.

"I can explain that. The supreme court of the State has announced that it will hand down the decision in the 'direct legislation' cases Saturday morning. If the court decides against the constitutional amendments of 'seventeen, it will mean that all our popular reforms—the things I have been fighting for in this State for twelve years—are scrapped, just so much waste paper!"

"And you think that would defeat Governor Millender?"

"Don't you, Babbin? You haven't been out of politics so long that you can't see the effect such a decision would have."

"I see that it would be a body-blow to the reform element."

"Which elected Millender two years ago by a margin of a few hundred votes only," the editor added.

Babbin considered the situation.

"The Weasel had some such idea," he said. "But since the Delta Land scheme went under, Mr. Elder, I've had too many troubles of my own, to watch politics." He paused a moment, then added: "Your idea is that Hanchett will decide with the three old-guard judges—"

"No question about it. Against the amendments! Yet they are as sound as the Constitution of the United States, if the supreme court pleases to say so."

"Then if you could put pressure on Hanchett—"

"If I can put the screws on him, I am going to save the State for decent government. It is that close!" The editor extended his big right hand, and with his thumbnail, measured off on the nail of his little finger the width of a hair. "Do you see my motive, now?"

"Of course, Mr. Elder. I can see your side. I fought you long enough to understand you. But you must remember that I've had a tough year. A man can't lose a fortune and his wife,—he can't see his daughters snubbed and ostracized and put to office-work,—he can't see everything he has go to smash, and still keep his mind on current events! Damn it all, Mr. Elder, you mustn't forget that I am Eric Babbin, president of the Delta Lands Corporation, with the penitentiary doors gaping for me!"

The man wiped his forehead, relaxed in his chair, and took out a cigar—a stogie. His hands trembled as he lighted it.

"I'm sorry I blew up that way, Elder," he said in a different voice.

"Don't mind me," the editor said, smiling. "And don't ask sympathy, either. You remember that the *Journal* exposed the Delta company three times before the smash. And perhaps you read some of the letters we printed from stockholders and land-buyers in your enterprise."

"I did. I'm not asking for sympathy. But you have the wrong pig by the ear."

"Is this your alibi?"

"I have none. I'm willing to take my share of the responsibility standing up.

What makes me see red—what brought me here tonight to meet you and the Weasel and his man—is that the real crook is getting out from under."

The editor frowned.

"Do you mean your auditor? But he only stole a few hundred from your safe!"

"Oh, I'm not talking about Bain. Bain is small-fry. I mean the man who planned the smash of the Delta and who wrecked it and who got away with the loot!"

Elder leaned forward, arms on the table. It was plain that he was completely nonplused.

"Wait a minute, Babbin," he demanded. "Let me get this straight. I thought the Delta Corporation went into a receiver's hands. Loot? There wasn't any!"

"Wasn't there?" Babbin laughed bitterly. "There was something over a quarter of a million in securities and cash. Did you ever hear of a court's receiver finding everything?"

"Snell hasn't found much—that's a fact. But if there is so much behind your smash-up, why haven't you talked before, Babbin?"

Babbin shrugged.

"Because, of all the suckers who went into Delta Lands, I was the first and the biggest. The man who got away with the assets caught me with pretty bait, right at the beginning. There wasn't the scratch of a pen to show that he was in the organization at all. I was president. I was general manager. I was the Delta Lands Corporation. And now I am going to weave jute-sacks in the penitentiary!"

"Oh!" The editor leaned back, the frown still on his face.

"I see. You couldn't prove a word of this?"

"Not a syllable."

"Do you want to tell me who your man was? Do I know him?"

"I think so."

"Local man?"

"Yes."

"You're not going to name him, though?"

Suddenly Babbin was transformed. His face was tortured into a mask of hatred; his hands clenched, and he rose to his feet and came, in one stride, to the round-topped table.

"Am I going to name him?" he cried, raising a fist. "By God, Mr. Elder, that's what I brought you here to do! The man who made me a homeless outcast, broke up my family, and set my two girls to work for their bread is the Honorable Maxwell Hanchett, justice of the supreme court of this State!"

He brought his fist down on the table with such force that it jumped from the floor.

The editor was a large man himself, with a rather heavy face relieved by kindly human lines and lights. He was the worst hated, the most feared, and one of the best loved men in the State. From his days as a cub reporter he had been a crusader. He fought with both fists and a trenchant pen. He had turned up more crookedness, exposed more sham, spot-lighted more obscure and vicious corners in politics and society than any other man in the West. And for a



Two furtive, unlovely men entered, bearing a suitcase.

pastime he took convicts from the State prisons and turned them loose on his home ranch to give them a chance! He had heard revelations, life-stories, confessions from all sorts and conditions. He had been approached by every known variety of scalawag, blackmailer, stool-pigeon, detective and man-trapper, but he had never been fooled. Quack confessions he nailed instantly.

He knew now that Eric Babbín was telling the truth.

"Sit down, Babbín," he said, in a moment. "I don't need to tell you that I am surprised at your story. You must have guessed I would be, even though I knew that Max Hanchett was interested in many enterprises. For the last twelve years he has been making money. But no one guessed that he was in the Delta Corporation."

Babbín sat down, swallowed, and became again the quiet, sure, calm man of affairs the world knew. He relighted his stogie, nodded to the editor.

"No one will ever guess it," he said calmly. "I'm the goat."

"I'm afraid you are, Babbín. There is one thing more I would like to understand."

"Well?"

"Where does the Weasel come in on this?"

"I'm paying him."

"Oh! Yes, I've heard the Weasel would do anything for money—even to double-crossing his friends and his political bosses. But unless you are able to pay him well—"

"I'm not able to, Mr. Elder—but I'm doing it."

"How much?"

Babbín took a pocket-book from his overcoat and threw it to the table. Under an elastic running through the book were two bank-notes, each for five thousand dollars.

Elder whistled. "That's quite a sum of money for a bankrupt," he observed impersonally.

Babbín smiled and nodded again.

"I saved a little from the wreckage. In the last week or so I have managed to dispose of a few things we got out of the house before it went. My boy sold his ponies. Look here, Elder!"

With a gesture that would have been melodramatic if it had not been so spontaneous, Babbín threw back his overcoat. Under it was a worn and almost shabby smoking-jacket. He pulled from a fob pocket in his trousers his great nicked watch. Then he held out his left hand, palm down.

"Maybe you remember the big diamond I had? Your reporters wrote it up once, I remember, in one of your stories about the Delta. Well, it's gone with the rest—into those bills!"

"Do you mean that you are putting everything you have into this plant to get Hanchett?"

"That's exactly what I mean. I wasn't going to tell you, or anyone. But you've dragged it out of me."



Gaffey started back, for the face that was thrust forward at his shoulder was that of Mr. Justice Maxwell Hanchett.

The dramatic elements of the situation caught the editor up, and for a moment he contemplated them. Then he returned to the business in hand.

"It looks as though you are in earnest, Babbín. But how are you going to get Hanchett?"

"His foot slipped—just once. The Weasel found the slip."

"And brought it to you for sale?"

"Yes. He had suspected, from things he knew, that I would be a good market. He told me he would have gone to you except that you don't usually pay for your information."

"That's correct. I might have paid something for this. What did he ask?"

"Twenty-five thousand. I didn't have that much, of course. We compromised on all I could get my hands on."

"Was that slip of Hanchett's a real slip? I mean, can I use it?"

Babbín chuckled. "You don't suppose I'd put a last ten thousand on a dark horse, do you, Mr. Elder?"

"Let me have an outline of it."

"I'm sorry, but you will have to wait. You don't take my

word for anything in the whole case, you understand. I have been studying the matter over for a week—ever since the Weasel first brought it to me. At first I thought I would go to the district attorney with it. But I saw that wouldn't do."

"No, you were right. Sanders would cover it up."

"And tip off Hanchett. Exactly! Then I thought of Governor Millender. But you know how the old gentleman is—slow and careful and suspicious. He's been sold so often. And besides, he might give Hanchett a chance to slip out quietly and disappear."

"You expect Hanchett to resign, I take it?"

The bankrupt sat back for a moment, and his face colored until it was aflame.

"Expect him to?" he echoed. "Mr. Elder, if Max Hanchett doesn't settle down in his chair and go out—pff!—like that, from his weak heart, when we confront him with what we have, he will sign a resignation as fast as he can write his name on it. Expect? Here!"

Babbin reached forward, picked up his pocket case, took from it three slips of paper, replaced the book in his overcoat pocket, and handed the slips to Elder. The editor took them. They were triplicates of a typed letter, running:

THE HONORABLE SILAS MILLENDER,
Governor's Mansion.

My dear Governor:

For personal reasons, having nothing to do with my relations either with you or my associates, I am compelled to offer you my resignation, with the request that it be accepted by you to take effect at once.

Yours very truly,

Associate Justice, Supreme Court of—

BABBIN waited until the editor had read the lines.

"One copy for the Governor, one for you, and one for me," he explained. "Lay them on the table, Mr. Elder. And here!" He leaned forward and put beside them on the table a cheap fountain pen, uncapped, and with the bluish tinge of ink staining the nib.

"That's how sure I am!" he cried.

The editor looked at his watch.

"It's nine-thirty now," he said, half to himself. "North could have the inside made up in an hour; Parmenter could make a layout; and Morphy and Armstrong could do three columns by eleven. That would put us on the street in time to catch the late theater crowds—and to meet all the newspaper trains outside. Um-m-m!" He turned to Babbin, who was watching him keenly and who seemed to understand clearly enough for his purposes the vernacular in which the editor spoke.

"Just tell me in a few words what you charge Hanchett with," he demanded. "If it is as big as you think, I can get out extras tonight, but there is no time to waste."

"It is another man's story," Babbin answered promptly. "He will be here any minute. And when he is through, you can close in on Hanchett—"

"Hold on, though. What if Hanchett should be out of town?"

"He isn't," Babbin smiled. "He is at the Alcazar Theater now; after that, he is going to the Belmont for supper with Morgan Faber and a party."

"You seem to have checked up on him pretty closely."

"Not I. It was the Weasel." And Babbin added: "He knows how to earn his money when he starts in."

"All right. Let's not waste time. In ten words—what is your indictment?"

"Why, it can't be done in ten words. A little while ago you said you knew that Hanchett had been making money for twelve years."

"Yes—about that time."

"You remember the Slade will case, in 1910?"

"Yes."

"After years of litigation it went to the supreme court—had two hearings."

"Yes. The first time the court refused to order a new trial. Then, as I remember it, some new point came up and was argued at length."

"That's almost correct. Only the new point wasn't argued at length. The court refused to listen to it—said it was sheer imperitance, or words to that effect."

"I'd forgotten. Well?"

"As the case stood then, the wife and her family were to get something like eight or ten millions, while Charley Slade, the son, was to have the interest on a few hundred thousand. He was a rank outsider."

"But he won!" the editor said, starting. "Of course! I'd forgotten."

"He won!" Babbin echoed, rubbing his hands. "In the first hearing the court stood four to three in favor of the widow's claim: Arbuthnot, Jones, Daly and Hanchett."

"But on the second hearing—"

"Max Hanchett changed his vote."

The editor's face set—he stared at the table-top for a moment, thinking deeply. Then he said slowly:

"What did he get for it?"

"Harbor City Water Company bonds."

"How much?"

"Plenty—enough to start him on the way to wealth."

"Were the bonds transferred to him direct?"

"That's the other man's story, Mr. Elder. But they were transferred."

"You have the record of transfer?"

Babbin's mouth dropped; his hands fell slack on his knees.

"I—I don't know."

"We would have to have something as tangible as that, you know."

"Couldn't you—wouldn't you be willing to risk— Wait!"

He jumped up, ran to the sliding panel in the corner and took out a telephone hidden there. He gave a number the editor did not catch; presently he obtained his connection and spoke:

"Is Saul there? . . . No? Take a message for him. Have him call Babbin. . . . All right. . . . Good! Put him on the wire. . . . Saul? . . . This is Babbin. Our case isn't complete without the records showing that transfer of. . . . What? . . . Oh, thank God! . . . Why, about half an hour, I should say. Yes, make it half an hour, if the other man is ready. . . . All right. We're waiting for him. Good-by!"

He wiped his face with a frayed handkerchief. When he laughed, there was a hysterical catch in his voice.

"The Weasel thinks of everything!" he exclaimed. "He has located those books; and two of his—friends are—borrowing them tonight. They will be here."

"Friends?" Elder echoed, mildly surprised. "A burglary, eh?"

"I suppose so. But what do you care?"

"I don't care," the editor returned, rising swiftly, as one who reaches a decision and acts upon it impulsively. "Is that a telephone I can use?"

"Sure. We had it connected up for you this afternoon. Go ahead!"

In a moment Elder had his connection.

"Hello, North," he said, biting off his words. "This is Mr. Elder. . . . Never mind that. I want you to rout out the composing room and press gang for a midnight extra. Make up the inside with the liveliest stuff in the seven o'clock. Call Morphy and Armstrong, or if you can't locate them, get Field and Miss Bartlett! . . . Right! . . . Wait, and I'll tell you. Send one reporter to Hammack's saloon—you know where it is? . . . Well, they'll know. On Front Street, near Dupont—upstairs. Hammack will tell him. Have a layout made by the art department for three columns; I'll come back in time to find the cuts. . . . No, it's a graft case with a bearing on Tuesday's elections. Better use a two-column of Governor Millender on the inside, and run it with a rewrite of that campaign stuff we used Wednesday—that will have to do. . . . No, nothing sure yet. And North! Call Barbour at the capitol and tell him to get the Governor's secretary out of bed to have Millender ready for an interview any time before midnight. . . . It's Hanchett, if we land him—and you'd better put somebody at a column of review of the 'direct legislation' cases—Morphy knows them best. . . . Don't call me unless you have to, but I'm in Room Nineteen at Sailor Hammack's. . . . Yes. . . . Yes. . . . That's right. 'By!'"

As he turned from the instrument, the editor found Babbin at his elbow.

"The Weasel's man is outside," he said in a lowered tone. "Are you ready for him?"

"Yes," Elder answered. And he sat down expectantly, facing the door.

AARON SAUL, better known as the Weasel, was a man the editor of the *Journal* was anxious to know. Of him and his activities he knew a great deal—a great deal of generalization, report, rumor and reputation that it would have been impossible to use in print in any fashion. A jury-briber, a procurer of perjurers and thugs, a confidant of the denizens of the underworld, a power because of his acquaintance with, or possession of, an

infinite number of dangerous secrets, and indirectly involved in most, if not all, of the *sub rosa* political deals, conspiracies, arrangements and pacts of a State enormously interested and concerned in politics, the Weasel was, nevertheless, very little more than a legend to most men, including Editor Elder. It was doubtful whether more than a dozen persons in the city knew him to speak to, improbable that anyone knew him well. All sorts of tales were told of him, all manner of horrible crimes ascribed to him, all kinds of powers and capabilities accredited to him. And this was the more surprising because he was fairly definitely described as a small, mild, quiet person, petty and mean in his habits and aspirations, a victim of some consuming drug addiction, and finally and wholly untrustworthy. For money Saul would do anything—literally anything!

Living the sort of life he did, and having the sort of associates he must,—if, indeed, he had any at all!—it was a source of continual wonder to those who knew of him that he was not poisoned in some dive, knifed in some dark back-room, or shot down in some tortuous alleyway. There could be only two explanations: one that he held too many secrets of others and was, therefore, too valuable; one that none could more than suspect his connection with any of the sinister happenings to which he was probably privy. Editor Elder had seen the Weasel twice, but he had been baffled to recall, after those chance and casual meetings, anything about the man at all. His appearance, his dress, his manner—even the few words he had uttered—seemed to have left an impression so slight, or so vague, as to be impossible of re-creation in memory. He smiled slightly now, waiting opposite the stairway door, to think that at last he was to see the Weasel face to face, with leisure, in spite of the pressing importance and the dramatic nature of what he might expect in the next few minutes, to obtain and fix in his mind a clean-cut likeness of the mysterious and elusive character.

BUT the individual whom Babbin admitted came alone, moving with a peculiar, shuffling tread, and blinking in the light. He was a lean, stooped man, who seemed very old and weary, yet who, from his face and manner, could not have been much over forty. He took off his cloth cap with a humility that was almost repulsive, and revealed iron-gray hair, thin and stringy. His eyes had a haunted look, his face a peculiar, indescribable pallor, in spite of the points of color on either cheek-bone; and he held his cloth cap in his hands against his breast with an air shockingly timorous and deferential. Benton Elder had seen the marks too often to be in doubt: the new arrival was an ex-convict.

"Who is this?" he asked sharply, turning to Babbin.

"This is Malcolm Gaffey, Mr. Elder. Don't you remember helping to get his petition for parole acted on last month?"

"Gaffey? Oh, yes." He rose on his long, powerful legs, and stretched out a hand to the man. "I'm glad to know you, Gaffey," he said in his big, warm tones. "Sit down."

"Thank you, Mr. Elder." The man shuffled into a chair near the table, putting his hands on the edge and fumbling nervously with the cloth cap. "They told me you helped to get me out. I'm—I'm much obliged."

"Not at all, Gaffey. One of our boys looked you up—Eddy, wasn't it? A reporter."

The ex-convict's face brightened momentarily. "Oh, Mr. Eddy? He works for you? He's a fine boy, Mr. Elder."

"Eddy told me you had been railroaded to 'the big house.' In nineteen-ten, wasn't it?"

"Sentenced on a frame-up, October eighth, nineteen hundred and ten, at three-eight in the afternoon—yes sir. Fifteen years!"

Babbin, the ruined capitalist, threw aside his stogie, long since burned out. "Mr. Elder," he began, "Gaffey was railroaded to the penitentiary because he knew too much. If you want to confirm that part of the story, I can put you in touch with the man who arranged the whole plot against Gaffey, furnished the perjured witnesses and the false evidence, and managed the whole enterprise until this poor man was safely locked away. The man who did the thing will not talk himself, but he will turn up the tools he used—they will confess. Do you want them?"

"Eddy, my reporter, satisfied himself in a general way on this point," Elder replied. "But a confession in this Gaffey matter might strengthen our hands. Who is this man you spoke of?"

"Confidentially, of course?"

"Yes."

"It was the Weasel."

"Saul?"

"Yes," Babbin smiled. "It's the double-cross, Mr. Elder. You were right in saying that Saul would do anything for money."

Elder frowned.

"Even to selling me out with a framed-up story," he said suspiciously.

"Yes, even to that," Babbin retorted boldly. "But you don't have to take his word for anything here. Shall we go on?"

"Yes, go on." He turned to the ex-convict. "You understand what we want, do you, Gaffey?"

"Yes sir. The messenger-boy told me."

"What messenger-boy?"

"The one that brought me here just now. He had a piece of paper—he read it to me and then made me sign the back of it to show that I understood. He wouldn't let me see the face of the paper."

"Was that message written by anyone you know?"

"I suppose it was written by the Weasel."

"Do you know him—the Weasel?"

"Never saw him in my life, that I know of."

"All right; go on."

"I was to come here and meet you gentlemen and tell you of an entry of a transfer of bonds on the books of the Harbor City Water and Power Company."

"When was that entry made?"

"In June, nineteen-nine."

"How did you know about it?"

"I was the accountant in charge of those particular books of the company."

"I see. Go ahead, Gaffey—tell your story in your own way."

"All right, Mr. Elder." The man looked at the cap, which he turned and turned in his nervous, thin hands. He spoke hesitatingly, not as though doubtful of his tale, but as though doubtful of his own ability to put it to them clearly. "I went to work for the company—the Harbor City Water and Power Company—when I was eighteen, as a messenger. That was in 1908. I studied bookkeeping nights, and was promoted. In 1909 they gave me the stock-and-bond records to keep in the accounting department."

"In June of the next year, as I've said, the secretary's memorandum of a registered bond transfer came to my desk for entry. It—it noted the transfer of four hundred thousand dollars' worth of the company's 'Convertible Five's' from Charles Slade to a man named Mark Rosen. But there was a peculiar thing about the memorandum."

Gaffey paused, put a hand in his pocket, and drew out a worn and shabby bill-book. Babbin interrupted him sharply.

"You are getting ahead of your story, Gaffey," he said. "Do you remember anything about—"

"Yes, I forgot," the man said, turning his eyes humbly toward his interrogator. "Yes, that's correct, sir. Mr. Elder, do you remember the Slade will case? Yes. Well, there was lots of talk about it in our offices, because Mr. Charley Slade was one of the heirs—involved, you see. And he was well known and liked among us; we all felt as though we knew him, because he was one of the largest owners of our company and was in and out of the offices time and again."

"We had watched the Slade will case, because most of the money was left to Mrs. Slade, the second wife of the old man, Charley's father. Charley was contesting the will, but the case was decided against him. He fought bitterly—the matter was argued and carried up and tried over and over again, but finally the supreme court decided in favor of the widow. We all thought that ended the matter. But it didn't. Early in June the supreme court reversed itself, and Charley Slade won everything but a few hundred thousand dollars. The day after that decision was handed down, I got this memorandum."

WITHOUT any effort at dramatic effect, Gaffey turned over, with his trembling fingers, a faded slip of paper he drew from his wallet. The editor leaned down to examine it, drew a sharp breath, raised the fragment into stronger light.

"Well, I'm damned!" he cried explosively.

The slip bore a hastily written notation, in ink long faded to gray, directing that four hundred one-thousand-dollar bonds of the issue of 1906 be transferred from the account of Charles F. Slade to the credit of Mark Rosen.

But the damning detail of the note lay in this: that the name originally written as that of the transferee of the bonds

had been carelessly scratched through with a pen-stroke, and the name of Rosen substituted, in a different ink and hand.

The name lined through was "*Maxwell A. Hanchett*."

"I'd like to keep this, Gaffey," the editor said casually.

"I'm sorry I can't let you, Mr. Elder," the convict replied, with a surprising abruptness and force. "I was told not to give it up to anyone until—why, I understood there was a—some money to be paid—"

Babbin, who had been sitting in the shadow, leaned forward here.

"That's right, Mr. Elder," he said. "I am to pay Saul as soon as we have established the case in your mind, before we can get this evidence or can put Gaffey away in safety to prevent anyone's tampering with him. As soon as I pay up, Gaffey will go with us. Isn't that correct, Gaffey?"

"That was what I was told, sir."

The editor frowned—hesitated. He saw the facile hand of the Weasel—perceived how perfectly that little criminal's mind apprehended every contingency and protected himself in every possible way. Of course, if Hanchett were delivered over that evening—

"Very well, Gaffey. Put your memo away. Now go on."

"There isn't much more that is important to you, I guess, Mr. Elder," the ex-convict said with a sigh. "I—this looked strange to me, and I spoke to the head bookkeeper in my department, Paul Sherindon. Sherindon was surprised—he asked me for the slip. I lied to him, on the spur of the moment. I told him I'd thrown it away. A few minutes later the president and treasurer came in to my desk and asked me about the matter. I was afraid to confess, by that time—I lied again. They searched my wastebasket—all those in the department. It was plain that they were very anxious. But they did not bother me; they went into the secretary's office and were in conference there a long time. I hoped the thing would blow over; I took the slip home and gave it to my mother in an envelope, to keep for me. I thought then that I would return the memorandum to the secretary in a few days or destroy it—something. I had no intention of using it. I give you my word of honor I hadn't!"

THE man's voice had been rising—he extended his hands now to the editor and Babbin almost tearfully. He had forgotten, for the moment, that his penitentiary term was behind him; he was living through the terror of that afternoon many years before. Benton Elder reached out a big, warm hand and laid it on the trembling fingers extended to him.

"Take it easy," he said in a voice that rumbled but soothed. "It's all over now."

Gaffey shook himself, leaned back.

"Yes, that's so. Well, the next day I was invited to go to dinner in an Italian restaurant up on Forrest Avenue—I don't know which one. Two or three of the men had been asked, they said—it was somebody's birthday, I think. When I

got there, there was no one in the place I knew. They showed me an upstairs room; in it was a man I had never seen before, nor since. When the waiter had closed the door, this man knocked me out—with a sandbag, I always supposed, because there were no marks on my head afterward. When I woke up, I was in the county jail, and they told me I had been charged with embezzlement."

Gaffey stopped again, his eyes burning; then he relaxed wearily in his chair and began fidgeting once more with his tawdry cap. "The case was all framed up fine. The lawyer I had was a young fellow; I've heard lately that he and Paul Sherindon, the head bookkeeper I spoke of, are both high up in the water company now. I didn't have a chance. I got fifteen years."

His head sank on his breast; Elder saw two tears drop heavily. He turned to Babbin.

"Who was this Mark Rosen?" he inquired abruptly. "The dummy who was used in the transfer of those bonds? A real man?"

"Yes," Babbin answered. "We'll come to him when you're through with Gaffey."

"Do you mean that he will tell his part of the story?"

"He has told it," Babbin smiled—a hateful smile. "A man—our clever friend—has put the screws on him. There is a confession, sworn to in black and white. It tells only that Rosen loaned his name for this transfer, without inquiry as to why or as to the identity of the parties. Rosen is a Government attorney in the southern part of the State now—he has been taken care of, and the gang can't touch him. So he came clean."

"Did he turn those bonds over to Hanchett?"

"No; he signed his endorsement in blank. But his deposition confirms Gaffey, you see."

"I see. Well, that seems to complete the case—nearly enough for my purposes, at any rate."

"I thought you would say so, Mr. Elder," Babbin rose, leaning forward with a trace of excitement on him. "Are you ready for Hanchett?"

Hastily the editor ran over his notes, checking up. The net seemed tight; certainly publication of these facts would be sufficient to wreck Mr. Justice Hanchett's career. He nodded to Babbin, looked at his watch.

"Can you get him here?" he asked.

Babbin crossed to the telephone hastily. He gave some number, waited a moment, then asked sharply:

"Is Stiver there? . . . Let me speak to him, please. This is Babbin." After another delay: "Hello. This is Mr. Babbin. A friend of yours said you would be waiting for a message about the judge that slipped. . . . Yes—yes. . . . Why, the sooner the better. We're ready. . . . How long? . . . Thanks. Good-by."

He turned from the instrument.

"Hanchett will be here in twenty minutes, they think." He looked, with a slight rise of color, at his cheap watch. "That will be about ten o'clock," he added.

The editor spoke to Gaffey.

"You don't mind waiting, do you, Gaffey?"

The convict laughed harshly.

"Me? I've waited almost twelve years for this," he said simply.

ELDER put on the table before him a small note-pad on which, under cover of the table, he had been jotting names, dates and significant phrases. From a side pocket he took a large sheaf of "copy paper;" with a heavy, soft-leaded pencil he began calmly to write. Babbin and Gaffey watched his hand; the first smiling a little, the convict with admiration. Save for the steady, sibilant drag of the lead on the paper and the ticking of dotted *i*'s or periods, there was no sound in the room. Five minutes passed; then a voice came up the well of that stairway:

"Is Mr. Elder up there? Open the door, will you—somebody? It's darker than a tomb!"

"Armstrong," Elder said, looking up. "One of the reporters. Open the door for him, will you, Babbin?"

A healthy, smiling, easy youth lounged into the room, his hat in his hand and a handkerchief at his forehead. "Whew! Couldn't get a taxi, Mr. Elder," he explained. "Had to walk. So I walked. Mr. North sent me."

"All right, Armstrong. Sit down. Is North ready for an extra?"

"All set, Mr. Elder." He grinned. "You're lucky, too!"

"What do you mean?"

"North got Havermale out of bed, and Havie opened up the leased wire and happened to pick out a big strike story from England, and an obit. of some scientist—forget his name. Died tonight in Philadelphia. So that fattens the inside pages."

"It does, for a fact." The editor smiled.

"But that isn't the real peacherino! There's a big double murder and suicide attempt—in the fast set. That's all I had time to hear. Miss Bartlett is covering it—Field is after pictures. Whale of a yarn, I guess."

"All right. With my story, then, we ought to be able to get out a fairly decent sheet. Now, here we go."

"Yes sir."

To Babbin's surprise, the editor made no reference to the case against Justice Hanchett in the facts he began to dictate. He opened by reciting that the Associate Justice had resigned, for private reasons. He told of Hanchett's long career on the bench. With easy familiarity he recounted incidents in the Judge's official biography going to show that, from the very first, Hanchett had been the unswerving and unwavering friend and savior of the big corporations and their friends and interests. He referred to case after case, particularly of more recent years, in which the plainly expressed will of the people that the government should be returned to their own hands had been flaunted and nullified by the supreme bench of the commonwealth, with Hanchett as bellwether of the flock. Even when a reform governor had appointed three new members, Hanchett had been able to hold the older man with him against democracy. He sketched briefly some facts about Hanchett's private life, his membership in



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The Director, School Department

THE RED BOOK MAGAZINE, 33 West 42nd Street, New York City

leading clubs and orders, his reputed wealth, his wide friendship among wealthy men and bankers. The reporter asked an occasional question—tersely, intelligently. In ten minutes the material for a considerable newspaper "story" was in notes.

THE reporter, sending the end of his interview, shuffled his loose sheets into a neat pile.

"I suppose we get the resignation itself from the capitol," he suggested.

"Don't bother about that. Have North save a double-column space for a box to put that in. Catch a taxi—I'll be up not later than ten-thirty, unless you hear from me."

"Yes sir." He hesitated. "North said this had something to do with the elections Tuesday. But it doesn't seem to—to hook up."

The editor chuckled.

"I'll hook it up—editorially," he said shortly. "And by the way, Armstrong; I know you've written about Room Nine—teen often. Have you ever been here before?"

The reporter colored and grinned again.

"Several times," he said. "I lost three weeks' salary here one night. But I broke even with a story that beat the town—the Calendar fraud case. You remember that?"

"There's no place you boys don't go, is there?" the editor exclaimed. "Lucky devils! Run for it, now!"

As the door closed:

"See here, Elder!" Babbin broke out abruptly. "You aren't going to let Hanchett out with a resignation, are you?"

The editor looked up from the copy to which he was returning.

"Why, I guess I am, if we get him."

"That doesn't suit me! It isn't enough."

"No?"

"No! Look at Gaffey, here: see what they did to him! Look at me: broke, published all over the country, on my way to the penitentiary! I want Hanchett shown up!"

"Oh, that's it, then?" The editor's voice was smooth and quiet. "Well, now, Babbin, you'll have to leave that part of it to me. I'm stooping to blackmail—I don't say it's the first time, in a good cause—but it's blackmail just the same. And what I want—what the reform party of this State wants—is to get Hanchett off the bench. If it's persecution you demand—revenge—you'll have to see to that yourself."

Babbin reflected.

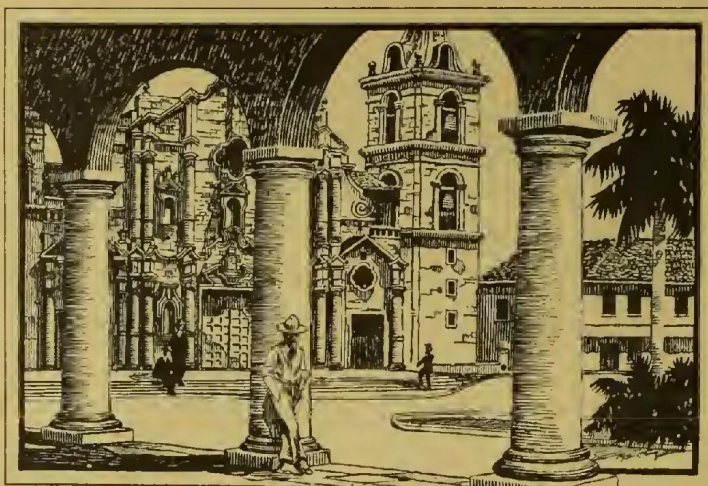
"I don't understand why you don't publish the story," he remonstrated. "If you suppress the facts, you are practically siding with Hanchett. You are legally an accessory to the crime."

The editor smiled.

"You have gotten to be a pretty fair lawyer lately, Babbin," he said, not unkindly. "But you are weak on details. I'm a newspaper editor, not the county attorney. You can lay your facts before him, or before the Bar Association."

Babbin snorted.

"A lot of good that would do me! You said yourself awhile ago that Sanders wouldn't prosecute. And the Bar Association—"



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"Well? Don't you see that if the proper authorities refuse to act, it would be rank persecution for me to publish this yarn? But there's another reason, Babbie. I have a heart."

"You don't mean that you are sorry for that high-grade scoundrel?"

"No. But he has a family. I know his wife and daughters. I have a wife of my own, and a couple of youngsters. I'm not perfect myself, Babbie, and I know how my family would feel. I'm gentler than I once was—"

They were so intent that neither of them heard. The ex-convict, Gaffey, leaned forward suddenly and touched the editor's arm.

"Somebody coming!" he whispered.

AS all three men straightened, the door was flung open and Mr. Justice Hanchett stood on the threshold.

He was a large, handsome, well-groomed man of almost sixty, but erect, debonair, in his prime. He wore evening clothes and a loose coat, unbuttoned, with a top hat. In his hand he carried a stick, graceful and light, but turned from some springy, tough wood that would make it, with its heavy onyx head, a formidable weapon. That the Judge was fearless for himself was apparent: he looked about the room with swift appraisal before he entered, but when he did, it was with a careless air that commanded respect.

There was the least contraction of his brows when he saw Babbie, but he ignored both him and the ex-convict thereafter, turning sharply on the editor.

"Strange place for an appointment, Elder," he said. "Be good enough to explain what your message meant."

"Good evening, Judge," Elder replied, unabashed and calm. "I sent you no message."

"What is this, then?"

He threw down a typewritten note, on Elder's own *Journal* office editorial letterhead. It was neatly typed:

My dear Judge: I am in possession of facts regarding a matter of bonds of the Harbor City Water and Power Company, which have been known heretofore to a very few persons, including one Malcolm Gaffey, a convict; Mark Rosen; and Mr. Charles Slade. If you care to discuss my possible use of those facts with me, I will meet you immediately in Room Nineteen of 412 Front Street.

BENTON ELDER.

The editor smiled.

"I didn't write that, Judge, or know of it's being written. However, that doesn't matter. I might have written it. Will you sit down?"

"No." The answer was crisp, final. "I have only a moment, Mr. Elder—for foolishness. The note was handed to me in the theater; my party is expecting me at the Belmont about eleven. What is all this folderol about?"

THE editor leaned back, studying the jurist. The imperturbable calm of Hanchett's face was perfect. Yet Hanchett had come.

"Judge," Elder began with thoughtful care for his words, "in nineteen-ten you changed your opinion in the then cele-

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brated Slade will case, involving something like four million dollars' worth of property. As you may remember."

"Proceed."

"A bookkeeper in the offices of the Harbor City Water and Power Company discovered by accident, on the following day, that four hundred thousand dollars' worth of bonds had been paid you by Charles Slade through a dummy named Rosen. The bookkeeper was spirited away—sent to the penitentiary. Last week he was released. He has told me his story. I have an affidavit from Rosen confirming it. My boys are in the *Journal* office now with an extra practically made up, to go on the street before midnight announcing your resignation from the bench. The resignation is written; all I ask of you is a signature. That, in substance, is the situation."

The Judge nodded.

"Very succinctly put, Mr. Elder." A slight sneer crept into his tones as he added: "Your editorials are more verbose—therefore less forceful. I hope they are built on a firmer foundation in fact. And I bid you good night!"

He turned, raising his hand to his hat-brim ceremoniously, and would have gone through the door had there not leaped into his path Babbin—pale, and almost chattering with hysteria.

"For God's sake, man!" he shouted. "You don't think we're bluffing, do you? That's Gaffey there—the man you—"

The Judge raised his cane.

"Stand aside, you incoherent fool!" he snapped.

Babbin reached up and seized the strong arm.

"I won't! This thing comes off tonight! Pay attention—or you'll be in the penitentiary yourself in a month—where you're letting them send me—where you sent Gaffey." And he pointed to the shrinking and frightened ex-convict.

It was that face, pale with the pallor of prison upon it, that checked Hanchett. He lowered his cane, wet his lips, turned once more to Benton Elder. The editor had sat impassive through this dialogue—waiting, puzzled, half-doubtful.

"You always did fancy audiences for your little comedies, Elder," the Judge said, with a strong effort to regain his wonted manner. "Put away your babbling friend Babbin, or he may come to harm." He approached the table once again. "Do you really expect to gain anything by this sort of stupid child's play, Elder?"

As he was often known to do, the editor reached an instant decision. For answer he rose, strode across to the corner cupboard and took out the telephone. Judge Hanchett watched him, with a half-smile on his lips.

"Hello, *Journal*," Elder said in a moment. "Put North on. . . . That you, North? . . . Elder. Are you ready for the first page? . . . Good. Armstrong ought to be there any minute with the story—Judge Hanchett's resignation. Run it two columns, double-leaded, with a ten-point lead. Hold Barbour on an open line from the capitol and have the Governor standing at his elbow not later

than eleven-ten. . . . Yes? . . . Oh, tell Fennessey to keep his shirt on—we'll go to press about eleven-thirty. . . . I'm coming over presently. Print five thousand the first run, then twenty thousand for up-State points and across the river. . . . Fine. . . . Hold them all ready for the gun. Good-by!"

He turned from the telephone.

"That's how far this child's play has gone, Judge," he said.

JUSTICE HANCHETT pursed his lips—rubbed his fingers once or twice over the smooth knob of onyx on his cane.

"I don't know what to say to a black-mailer like you, Elder," he began slowly. "Of course your case is silly—preposterous. A single line of what you have just charged me with, published in the *Journal*, would mean libel suits, civil and criminal, that would wreck you and your sheet. You know that."

"I've heard that sort of thing before, Judge—yes!"

"Exactly. You and I aren't young enough to waste time or words in idle threats or quarreling, even over a thing as vicious and cowardly and—dastardly as your attack. For argument's sake, let us assume that you have just possession all these facts, as you call them. What sort of a bribe is this supposed to have been?"

"Four hundred thousand dollars' worth of Harbor City Water Company bonds, transferred to you by Charley Slade the day after you changed your opinion in the case that gave him a four-million-dollar estate instead of a legacy of a few thousand a year."

"All right. Assuming that this ex-convict friend of yours, and your other friend, who, if I am correctly informed, may shortly become a convict for defrauding a few thousand people of their life savings in some corrupt land deal—"

Babbin leaped up, shaking with anger.

"You lie!" he cried. "You know who got their money in the Delta scheme—and left me holding the sack! You did, Max Hanchett!"

The Judge whirled on him.

"I advised you to clear out of this!" he said in a slightly raised tone. "I'll have no words nor dealings with you at all, Babbin. And you make it almost impossible for me to stay here and give Mr. Elder even that scant courtesy a well-meaning blackmailer merits! . . . Now, Elder."

The editor smiled.

"The only courtesy I ask, Judge, is that you sign your resignation and give it to me."

"So I understood. As I was saying, assuming that these men testify to the facts as you represent them to me, your case would fall utterly to pieces in any court in the land. The best evidence of that hypothetical stock-transfer—was it stocks?"

"Go on, Judge."

"Stocks or bonds, then—would be found in the records of the corporation issuing them. Now, I believe you named the Harbor City Water and Power Company. Is that correct?"

"Go ahead."

"Then perhaps you have forgotten that, in about 1913 or '14, the office—"

building of that corporation burned down. To the ground, Mr. Elder. . . . Oh, you do recall that, now?"

In spite of himself Elder had started. He had seen from the first his urgent need of those books, had at the first required them of Babbin and his mysterious conspirator. The jurist—cool, careless, easy—had put his finger instantly on the one weak link in the chain of evidence. The testimony of Gaffey, the ex-convict, would need potent corroboration. Mark Rosen had testified to little—might even be reached, yet, by powerful friends of Hanchett; and Hanchett had powerful friends, as Elder had good reason to know. The remainder of the case was circumstantial—damning, but poor stuff with which to defend a libel suit, bitterly prosecuted! Now—this reminder!

He sat for a moment looking at the copy spread before him on the table, and the corners of his mouth sagged a little. Then he looked up.

"Yes, Judge," he said frankly, "I had forgotten that fire. But I am satisfied with our case, in spite of everything." He leaned forward and laid his clenched hands on the table before him. "Judge Hanchett," he said solemnly, in the voice of a crusader, "I would jeopardize the *Journal* and my own freedom to break the gang to which you belong at next Tuesday's election. I tell you honestly that I will take my chances. Do you want to take yours?"

Judge Hanchett laughed, caught the top buttons of his coat, tucked his cane under his arm.

"The dignity of the bench on which I have the honor to sit," quoth he, "usually gives pause to snapping dogs. I think you will change your mind."

HE was turning for a second time to leave the room when the stairway door opened. Two men entered,—roughly dressed, furtive, unlovely men,—bearing a suitcase. Elder, his eye caught by the first movement of the door inward, had a fleeting impression that the pair had been almost pushed into the room by a third; he thought or imagined that he saw, dimly, a vague face that wore a cunning and satisfied smile. But he could not be sure, either then or afterward. And at no time could he revisualize that face in memory.

Meantime, however, Justice Hanchett had stepped aside swiftly, lightly, until his back was to the wall opposite Babbin. He gripped his cane and waited. Babbin and Gaffey stared.

"Well, boys," Editor Elder said, breaking the moment's tense silence, "you've got the wrong room, haven't you?"

"I guess we aint," the first man answered shortly. "I was told to come here with some junk. You're Mr. Elder, aint you?"

"Yes."

"I've seen you around. Don't matter who I am. Me and my pardner, here, was sent to touch a plant tonight—we jest got through."

"You mean to commit a burglary, do you?" Elder asked.

"Don't need to use such hard language, brother," the second man interrupted, grinning.



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Dear Sirs:

Will you allow me to take issue with your A.K.K. from Zanesville, who insists that the best pipe of the day is the one smoked right after breakfast?

Of course, I have no intimate knowledge of local conditions down in Southern Ohio, but up here the majority of us regular pipe smokers have a decided leaning towards the last pipe of the evening.

Take a night when you are sitting in front of the fire after the neighbors have gone. Your wife suggests it is bedtime, and while you admit it is, you have a craving for one last smoke. She goes on upstairs and you promise to follow directly. But instead you take out your pipe and light up. You smoke slowly and peacefully, calling out at intervals that you'll be there in a minute. Only you don't go until the last ash has died in the bowl of your pipe.

That's my idea of the best smoke of the day.

Yes, sir, for every smoker A. K. K. can produce who likes his after-breakfast pipe best, I'll guarantee to name a dozen men who prefer the last smoke of the evening. And most of us are Edgeworth smokers, too.

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(Signed) T. S. Flint,

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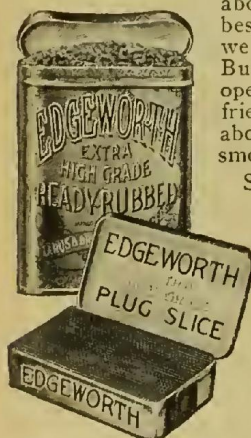
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But the first, contributing a slight, cold smile to his companion's levity, nodded.

"Call it that," he said, clearing his throat and spitting noisily. "We was to get a certain record-book. Number Twelve book, it was. Well, when we got into this here plant—"

"Some people have all the luck!" his companion interrupted hoarsely.

"A certain friend of ours is one of 'em," the other retorted. "Yes, the luck broke good. There was a fire in them books sometime—when we got at 'em, the whole damn' row was burned from the ends—clear to the middle. Twenty-five books in the damn' row. Luck? I'll say it is!"

Elder, humoring these precious scamps and hiding his impatience, spoke mildly.

"The fire destroyed some of these records, then?"

"Burned 'em up from both ends of the row. But it left the guts of Book Twelve—scorched, but all ka-hunky. If a fellow was religious, now, by God—"

He interrupted himself on this philosophical tag and raised the suitcase. From it he took the charred and smoke-blackened fragment of a ledger and threw it to the table.

Babbin leaped for it; Elder half rose in his chair. Judge Hanchett licked dry lips.

"Gaffey!" Babbin cried. "Gaffey, see here! You told us Volume Twelve. Is this it?"

Gaffey came shuffling forward, took hold of the ruined volume with familiar hands, searched hastily and turned up a page—put his finger on an entry. Then he started back, with a frightened cry.

For the face that was thrust forward at his shoulder—a face from which had been wiped all confidence, all sneering, and that was now slate-colored, weary—was that of Justice Maxwell Hanchett.

Hanchett swallowed, to make speech possible.

"What do you want me to do, Elder?" he asked in a low tone—brokenly.

THE BARNACLE

(Continued from page 38)

Special messengers would bring the other things tomorrow.

Arrived once more in the gloomy fastnesses of the Gainsley castle, Mattie dressed. For the first time she felt the intimate touch of silk against her body. She put on gray silk stockings, cobweb thin, and oddly cut gray slippers that buckled with little clusters of gleaming stones. Then the new dress. A slip of silvery satin, flushed somehow with pink, and over it a great square of rosy gray tissue full of silver leaves and flowers, fine and thin. It dropped over the head, and hung in subtle folds, its corners weighted with silver tassels. Low around the waist the stuff had been slashed to admit a twisted cord of dull silver beads, starred with a pink rose. It was a dress of moonshine and mystery, and turned Mattie from a slim and boyish girl into a twilight flower.

"If you would only let me do your hair, Madame!" said Louise mournfully. "And a little, a very little rouge."

But Mattie shook her head.

SHE dined alone with Ned and his father, and the two men were frankly interested in her metamorphosis. "You're lovely as a dream, Mats," Ned declared. "Gee, I'm glad George Marsh isn't here tonight. He'd steal you, sure."

And Richard Gainsley had looked at her with his cold eyes, and said: "I'm afraid you're a vast deal more clever than Thérèse gives you credit for." To which Mattie made no answer. From it, however, she could imagine Thérèse's comments: "Dowdy—stupid—country." However, that didn't matter. She was willing to build a wall between the Gainsley women and herself, provided she could keep Ned on her side of the wall.

Tonight she had a happy evening. The great house was as new and strange to Ned as it was to her, so they went, at his suggestion, on a tour of exploration. They trailed through the wide rooms,

even venturing below stairs, which Mattie found most interesting of all, since here was the real internal mechanism of the great place. The French range, the excellently planned scullery, the tiled, well-fitted laundry, the two enormous, self-icing refrigerators, the servants' dining-room, all amused her by its contrast with the primitive kitchen, the old cook-stove, the "cool well," the pump and wash bench, and the icehouse of Virginia.

"Oh my, I'd like to run this place," she told Ned. "Wouldn't it be heaps of fun? How does your mother ever do it?" Secretly she thought Thérèse must be far more capable than she looked.

"Oh, Thérèse never bothers—there's a housekeeper."

Afterward, in their rooms, she asked Ned about his work.

"It's easy enough, Mats. Dad put me in old Putnam's office; he's the purchasing agent for all the factories, and he's been there twenty years, so you may imagine it doesn't leave me much to do. It's all sort of confusing, and mixed up. Putnam's very kind, though, and I think I'm going to like it when I get the hang of it. You wouldn't believe how Dad's plants have grown. When I haven't anything else to do Putnam suggested that I take reports and figures and study them, and make a digest—to get some idea, you know. I dare say Dad told him to put me up to it. I think Dad means to be—kind. But he's hard. He likes you, though; that's plain. Don't let the things he says hurt you."

"They don't hurt me. I think he's very unhappy."

"Unhappy! Dad!"

She put her arms around him. "Ned, he hasn't anything but money. That's why I think he's unhappy. I can't imagine that he and Thérèse ever were as you and I."

They clung to each other. "Oh, Mattie," said the boy, brokenly, with a flash